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ABSTRACT

The National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) believes there is a basic body of knowledge and fundamental skills one must possess to be effective in counseling students as they progress through school and make decisions regarding their postsecondary educational alternatives. Competencies common to school counselors and admission counselors at the college and university level include: (1) possession and demonstration of exemplary counseling and communication skills; (2) ability to understand and promote student development and achievement; (3) ability to facilitate transitions and counsel students toward the realization of their full educational potential; (4) ability to recognize, appreciate, and serve cultural differences and the special needs of students and families; (5) demonstration of appropriate ethical behavior and professional conduct in the fulfillment of roles and responsibilities; (6) ability to develop, collect, analyze, and interpret data; and (7) demonstration of advocacy and leadership in advancing the concerns of students. In addition to these, school counselors must possess the ability to organize and integrate the precollege guidance and counseling component into the total school guidance program. The admission counselor at the college and university level must possess the ability to organize and support a college admission counseling program. NACAC believes that the responsibility for the design of specific curricula for the teaching of the knowledge and skill areas leading to these competencies belongs to the training agent. (LLL)

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE ADMISSION COUNSELORS

STATEMENT ON COUNSELOR COMPETENCIES

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Introduction

The National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) believes there is a basic body of knowledge and fundamental skills one must possess to be effective in counseling students as they progress through school (elementary through postsecondary education) and make decisions regarding their postsecondary educational alternatives. The association believes further, that the knowledge and skills can be defined in the form of competencies that counselors working in either school guidance or college admission should possess if they are to assist students effectively in realizing their full personal and educational potential.

To this end, NACAC has had a long-standing commitment to the provision of professional educational experiences for its members and to the establishment of standards for the pre-service and in-service training of school counselors, college admission counselors, and others involved in assisting students in their educational development.

During the 1980s, NACAC assumed a leadership role in developing workshops and institutes designed to provide school and college admission counselors with the knowledge and skills necessary to assist students with educational planning and decision making and to support their transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Many programs, designed by the NACAC Professional Relations Committee, are now being delivered to members and the counseling community in numerous settings across the nation.

NACAC assumed this assertive posture with respect to the professional preparation of its members because:

• Existing counselor education programs provide little or no attention to the precollege guidance and counseling aspect of the school guidance program.

• There is an absence of formal and informal training programs for professional counselors who function in admission programs and carry the admission counselor designation at the college or university level.

These facts were substantiated by a survey of members conducted in early 1990 by the NACAC Commission for the Advancement of Professional Standards (CAPS). CAPS was created in 1988 to examine professional preparation, certification, accreditation, and related credentialing issues, and the extent to which the association should become involved in sponsoring such activities. The survey of NACAC members provided substantial support for association involvement and leadership in the area of professional preparation. Sixty-five percent of the NACAC members responding rated the development of model curricula and training standards as an activity of "significant" importance. The subjective comments of respondents further endorsed the association's move in this direction.

Recognition of the Providers of Counselor Training

NACAC recognizes that a number of institutions, organizations and agencies have an appropriate role in the pre-service and in-service training of counselors, and it assumes that they will continue to perform these training functions in the future. These training agents include the graduate and professional schools at many colleges and universities throughout the nation. Reliable directories suggest that there are more than 400 graduate degree-granting programs for school counselors and college

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student affairs/development professionals.

Professional associations and organizations such as the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers, The College Board, the American College Testing Program, their affiliates, and others provide professional training. NACAC, along with its state and regional affiliates, is becoming increasingly active in providing workshop and institute training for members and the counseling profession.

Finally, the identification of competencies will assist program managers and supervisors in secondary school guidance and counseling offices and college admission offices in the design and implementation of position descriptions, staff development and in-service training programs, mentorship activities, and related professional renewal efforts.

In recognition of the varied interests and capabilities of these established training agents, NACAC has chosen to identify a number of competencies, general and specific, that school counselors and college admission counselors should possess if they are to assist students effectively in their educational development and in the transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

NACAC believes that the responsibility for the design of specific curricula for the teaching of the knowledge and skill areas leading to these competencies belongs to the training agent, so that each may develop its programs around its unique interests, abilities, and strengths. This will also ensure that a single, standardized curriculum, possibly presented through the use of a model syllabus, will not be presented and repeated by different training agents. Thus, all training programs will approach competency development differently, utilizing the strengths of the teaching staff and institutional resources and emphasizing the unique local needs and circumstances.

Addressing the Future Training of Counselors

A number of steps must be taken to ensure that all sectors currently involved in the pre-service and in-service training of counselors address the critical body of knowledge and concomitant skills.

First, specific courses of study, institutes, and workshops (e.g., Counseling Students for Postsecondary Education) need to be designed to ensure that current and future school and college admission counselors are provided with the knowledge and skills, that, when coupled with practice and experience, will lead to the acquisition of these competencies. Whether they take the form of graduate courses at colleges and universities or workshops offered by professional associations, these programs will require syllabi, agendas, resource materials, and experiential activities that promote competency development.

Second, knowledge and skills information need to be infused into all related courses and training experiences of school and college admission counselors. For example, information about standardized college admission testing should become an identifiable aspect of the course work that school counselors receive in educational tests and measurement; furthermore, types of postsecondary training and strategies for conducting a college search should be included with the study of career and vocational exploration. Finally, the practicum or internship experience of all prospective counselors should include practical experience in dealing with students involved in the college exploration and application process.

This infusion of knowledge and skills development across the preparation of the counselors will not only lead to the acquisition of professional competencies, but will also result in a clearer understanding of the role of the guidance and counseling and college admission processes by those who are preparing to serve as school and college admission counselors. It should result in improved services to students.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR COMPETENCIES

The school counselor plays a central and indispensable role in the precollege guidance and counseling process. Maximum effectiveness in serving students will be achieved if the school counselor possesses and demonstrates the following competences:

COMPETENCY 1

The Possession and Demonstration of Exemplary Counseling and Communication Skills

School counselors should:

✔ Assist students in developing a sense of awareness and self-worth, and in the acquisition of personal exploration, decision making and goal-setting skills needed to facilitate their educational development.

✔ Possess individual and group counseling and communication skills and employ an eclectic and balanced approach to assisting students and their parents.

✔ Understand and be sensitive to the nature and functioning of the student within the family, school, and community contexts.

✔ Recognize individual differences among students, including their aptitudes, intelligence, interests and achievements, and integrate an understanding of this information into the counseling relationship.

✔ Assist students and their families in addressing the personal, social and emotional concerns and problems that may impede their educational development. Work with teachers, pupil service specialists (e.g., psychologists, social workers), other educators, and related community representatives in addressing these concerns and problems.

✔ Possess the interviewing skills necessary to establish and maintain rapport with students and to assist them in gaining maximum benefit from the counseling relationship.

✔ Demonstrate mastery of written and verbal skills which can be utilized with multiple audiences and in a variety of situations, including, but not limited to:

- Counseling students and families
- Disseminating information to students
- Motivating and informing colleagues/associates
- Making public and professional presentations

✔ Possess the ability to engage in active listening with students, parents, colleagues, administrators and others and formulate relevant responses.

✔ Establish productive linkages with college admission representatives.

✔ Demonstrate an ability to negotiate and move individuals and groups toward consensus and/or conflict resolution.

✔ Recognize nonverbal indicators and cues and be able to bring crisis situations to a reasonable solution. Exercise tact, discretion, and diplomacy in dealing with sensitive circumstances.

COMPETENCY 2

The Ability to Understand and Promote Student Development and Achievement

School counselors should:

✔ Possess a knowledge of the psychology of children, adolescence and young adults, human growth and development and learning needs, and the relationship of counseling to the continuum of experiences in the lives of the students with whom they interact.

✔ Assist students in the assessment of their individual strengths, weaknesses, and differences, especially as they relate to academic achievement and postsecondary planning.

✔ Demonstrate an ability to counsel students in understanding the full range of educational and career options open to them, including the requirements for achieving success in these pursuits.

✔ Collaborate with teachers, administrators, and other educators in ensuring that appropriate educational experiences are provided that will allow all students to achieve success in their educational pursuits.

COMPETENCY 3

The Ability to Facilitate Transitions and Counsel Students Toward the Realization of Their Full Educational Potential

School counselors should:

✔ Provide information appropriate to the particular educational transition (e.g., middle school to high school, high school to college) and assist students in understand-

ing the relationship that their curricular experiences and academic achievements will have on subsequent educational opportunities.

✔ Demonstrate an ability to counsel students during times of transition, separation, and heightened stress.

✔ Possess and demonstrate an understanding of the current admission requirements, admission options, and application procedures employed by colleges and universities.

✔ Develop a counseling network (human resources) and provide tools and materials (nonhuman resources) for use by students in personalizing the exploration of postsecondary education opportunities. Examples include the following:

- Individual and group college guidance sessions for students and parents
- Computerized guidance information systems
- Workshops on topics such as test taking, application procedures, and financial aid
- College fairs and college days/nights
- College and career resource centers/libraries
- High school visits by college representatives

✔ Assist students in evaluating and interpreting information about college and other postsecondary education alternatives so that appropriate options are considered and included in the decision-making process.

✔ Assist students in understanding the admission process and how colleges, universities, and other postsecondary institutions make admission decisions. This should include information about the relative importance of the following:

- Student achievement in college preparatory courses
- Class rank
- Admission test scores
- Overall student achievement/skills
- Counselor/teacher recommendations
- Essays or writing samples
- Interviews
- Work/extracurricular activities
- Special requirements (e.g., audition, portfolio)
- Unique circumstances (e.g., variance in general demographic trends)

✔ Provide students and parents with information and assistance regarding admission application procedures and timelines.

✔ Demonstrate an ability to counsel students regarding their individual rights and responsibilities in the college admission process using NACAC guidelines.

✔ Establish linkages with departing students and alumni so they will feel welcome to return for continued assistance and/or to share their transition experiences.

✔ Assist students and their parents in understanding the costs of postsecondary education, the various forms of financial aid, and how they may access this assistance. This information should address the following:

- Student assistance application procedures
- Grants
- Scholarships
- Loans
- Work-study programs
- Other sources of financial assistance
- Financial planning programs

COMPETENCY 4

The Ability to Recognize, Appreciate, and Serve Cultural Differences and the Special Needs of Students and Families

School counselors should:

✔ Demonstrate an awareness of and sensitivity to the unique social, cultural, and economic circumstances of students and their racial/ethnic, gender, age, physical, and learning differences.

✔ Possess and demonstrate the counseling and consultating skills that will facilitate informed and responsive action in response to the cultural differences and special needs of students.

✔ Acquaint students with the school-based and outreach services and support systems designed to address their unique educational needs.

✔ Seek to improve and extend services to underserved students, especially those who are underrepresented among postsecondary education constituencies.

COMPETENCY 5

The Demonstration of Appropriate Ethical Behavior and Professional Conduct in the Fulfillment of Roles and Responsibilities

School counselors should:

✔ Recognize the interests and well-being of the student as paramount in the counseling relationship and place student interests above those of the institution.

✔ Demonstrate an understanding of and ability to counsel students in accordance with the National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) *Statement of Principles of Good Practice in the College Admission Process.*

✔ Represent individual students, as well as their institutions, honestly, openly, and in accordance with accepted professional standards and protocol.

✔ Demonstrate a knowledge of the school's particular educational philosophy and mission and develop a personal professional philosophy consistent with this objective.

✔ Demonstrate knowledge of the professional standards, policies, and practices of the National Association

of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) and other professional organizations.

✔ Engage in appropriate professional development and continuing education experiences to maintain the highest possible level of professional knowledge and skills.

COMPETENCY 6

The Ability to Develop, Collect, Analyze, and Interpret Data

School counselors should:

✔ Establish effective systems for conveying important data and information about students between educational levels.

✔ Understand the proper administration and uses of standardized tests and be able to interpret test scores and test-related data to students, parents, educators, institutions, agencies, and the public. These tests should include, but not be limited to the following:

- Preliminary American College Test (P-ACT)
- American College Test (ACT)
- Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT)
- National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT)
- Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)
- Achievement Tests
- Advanced Placement Test
- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
- College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
- Career/vocational aptitude and interest instruments
- General aptitude tests
- General achievement tests
- Tests of learning disabilities
- State/institutional tests (as applicable)

✔ Understand how individual and group data and statistics are used in building class and institutional profiles, constructing student transcripts, and preparing reports.

✔ Understand and interpret forms and data-driven documents that are a part of the admission and financial aid processes, including:

- Applications for admission
- Student descriptive questionnaires
- Admission charts and tables
- Letters of acceptance
- Needs assessment documents
  - — Financial Aid Form (FAF)
  - — Family Financial Statement (FFS)
  - — State scholarship forms/award letters

✔ Demonstrate a familiarity with available technology and the ways in which it can support the precollege guidance and counseling process:

- Guidance information systems
- Financial aid information and eligibility
- Relevant record-keeping and follow-up

✔ Use historical admission patterns and trends to assist students in gauging the appropriateness of their applications to particular colleges or universities.

COMPETENCY 7

The Demonstration of Advocacy and Leadership in Advancing the Concerns of Students

School counselors should:

✔ Advocate the educational needs of students and work to ensure that these needs are addressed at every level of the school experience.

✔ Provide training, orientation, and consultation assistance to faculty, administrators, staff, and school officials (e.g., school boards) to assist them in responding to the educational development and precollege guidance and counseling needs of students.

✔ Provide assistance to parents and families so that they will provide an informed and supportive environment in which students can become effective learners, and achieve success in the pursuit of appropriate educational goals.

✔ Understand the political issues and climate of the school or college and work to improve and extend programs and services that strengthen the educational experiences of all students.

COMPETENCY 8

The Ability to Organize and Integrate the Precollege Guidance and Counseling Component into the Total School Guidance Program

School counselors should:

✔ Ensure that their respective programs meet the guidelines set forth in the NACAC *Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor*.

✔ Promote the availability of a continuum (elementary through postsecondary education) of guidance and counseling experiences for all students addressing the precollege guidance and counseling process at all appropriate levels.

✔ Conduct appropriate planning, design, research, and evaluation activities to ensure that all precollege guidance and counseling services are maintained at an effective and relevant level.

COLLEGE ADMISSION COUNSELOR COMPETENCIES

The admission counselor at the college and university level plays a central and indispensable role in the precollege guidance and counseling and admission counseling processes. Maximum effectiveness in serving students will be achieved if the college admission counselor possesses and demonstrates the following competencies:

COMPETENCY 1

The Possession and Demonstration of Exemplary Counseling and Communication Skills

College admission counselors should:

✔ Assist students in developing a sense of awareness and self-worth, and in the acquisition of personal exploration, decision-making, and goal-setting skills needed to facilitate their educational development.

✔ Possess individual and group counseling and communication skills and employ an eclectic and balanced approach to assisting students and their parents.

✔ Understand and be sensitive to the nature and functioning of the student within the family, school, and community contexts.

✔ Recognize individual differences among students, including their aptitudes, intelligence, interests, and achievements, and integrate an understanding of this information into the counseling relationship.

✔ Recognize the personal, social, and emotional concerns and problems that may affect the students' educational development.

✔ Possess the interviewing and presentation skills necessary to establish and maintain rapport with students and to assist them in gaining maximum benefit from the counseling relationship.

✔ Demonstrate mastery of written and verbal skills that can be utilized with multiple audiences and in a variety of situations, including but not limited to:

- Counseling students and families
- Disseminating information to prospective students
- Making public and professional presentations

✔ Possess the ability to engage in active listening with students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and others and formulate relevant responses.

✔ Establish productive linkages with secondary school counselors, educators, and related individuals working with prospective college-bound students.

✔ Demonstrate an ability to negotiate and move individuals and groups toward consensus and/or conflict resolution.

✔ Recognize nonverbal indicators and cues and be able to bring difficult situations to a reasonable solution.

✔ Exercise tact, discretion and diplomacy in dealing with sensitive circumstances.

COMPETENCY 2

The Ability to Understand and Promote Student Development and Achievement

College admission counselors should:

✔ Possess an understanding of the psychology of adolescence and young adults, human growth and development and learning needs, and the relationship of counseling to the continuum of experiences in the lives of the students with whom they interact.

✔ Assist students in the assessment of their individual strengths, weaknesses and differences, especially as they relate to academic achievement and postsecondary planning.

✔ Demonstrate an ability to counsel students in understanding the full range of educational and career options open to them, including the requirements for achieving success in these pursuits.

COMPETENCY 3

The Ability to Facilitate Transitions and Counsel Students Toward the Realization of Their Full Educational Potential

College admission counselors should:

✔ Provide information appropriate to the high school to college transition and assist students in understanding the relationship that their curricular experiences and academic achievements will have on subsequent educational opportunities. Examples include the following:

- Individual and group guidance sessions for students and parents
- Workshops on topics such as application procedures and financial aid
- High school visits
- College fairs and college days/nights

✔ Possess and demonstrate an understanding of current admission requirements, admission options and ap-

plication procedures employed by various colleges and universities.

✔ Assist students in evaluating and interpreting information about college and other postsecondary education alternatives so that appropriate options are considered and included in the decision-making process.

✔ Assist students in understanding the admission process and how colleges, universities, and other postsecondary institutions make admission decisions. This should include information about the relative importance of the following:

- Student achievement in college preparatory courses
- Class rank
- Admission test scores
- Overall student achievement/skills
- Counselor/teacher recommendations
- Essays or writing samples
- Interviews
- Work/extracurricular activities
- Special requirements (e.g., audition, portfolio)
- Unique circumstances
  - — Institutional priorities
  - — Variance in general demographic trends
  - — Variance in specific applicant pool

✔ Provide students with information and assistance regarding admission application procedures and timelines.

✔ Demonstrate an ability to counsel students regarding their individual rights and responsibilities in the college admission process using NACAC guidelines.

✔ Assist students and their parents in understanding the costs of postsecondary education, the various forms of financial aid, and how they may access this assistance. This information should address the following:

- Student assistance application procedures
- Grants
- Scholarships
- Loans
- Work-study programs
- Other sources of financial assistance
- Financial planning programs

✔ Establish linkages with incoming students so that they will feel welcome to request continued assistance and/or to share their transition experiences.

COMPETENCY 4

The Ability to Recognize, Appreciate, and Serve Cultural Differences and the Special Needs of Students and Families

College admission counselors should:

✔ Demonstrate an awareness of and sensitivity to the unique social, cultural, and economic circumstances of students and their racial/ethnic, gender, age, physical, and learning differences.

✔ Possess and demonstrate the counseling and consultational skills that will facilitate informed and responsive action in response to the cultural differences and special needs of students.

✔ Acquaint students with the institutional-based and outreach services and support systems designed to address their unique educational needs.

✔ Seek to improve and extend services to underserved students, especially those who are underrepresented among postsecondary education constituencies.

COMPETENCY 5

The Demonstration of Appropriate Ethical Behavior and Professional Conduct in the Fulfillment of Roles and Responsibilities

College admission counselors should:

✔ Recognize the interests and well-being of the student as paramount in the counseling relationship and place student interests above those of the institution.

✔ Demonstrate an understanding of and ability to counsel students in accordance with the National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) *Statement of Principles of Good Practice in the College Admission Process.*

✔ Represent individual students, as well as their institutions, honestly, openly, and in accordance with accepted professional standards and protocol.

✔ Demonstrate a knowledge of the school's particular educational philosophy and mission and develop a personal professional philosophy consistent with this objective.

✔ Demonstrate knowledge of the professional standards, policies, and practices of the National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) and other professional organizations.

✔ Engage in appropriate professional development and continuing education experiences to maintain the highest possible level of professional knowledge and skills.

COMPETENCY 6

The Ability to Develop, Collect, Analyze, and Interpret Data

College admission counselors should:

✔ Establish effective systems for conveying important data and information about students between educational levels.

✔ Understand the proper administration and uses of standardized tests and be able to interpret test scores and test-related data to students, parents, educators, institu-

tions, agencies, and the public. These test should include, but not be limited to the following:

- Preliminary American College Test (P-ACT)
- American College Test (ACT)
- Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT)
- National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT)
- Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)
- Achievement Tests
- Advanced Placement Test
- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
- College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
- Career/vocational aptitude and interest instruments
- General aptitude tests
- General achievement tests
- Tests of learning disabilities
- State/institutional tests (as applicable)

✔ Understand how individual and group data and statistics are used in building class and institutional profiles, interpreting student transcripts, and preparing reports.

✔ Understand and interpret forms and data-driven documents that are a part of the admission and financial aid processes, including:

- Applications for admission
- Student descriptive questionnaires
- Admission charts and tables
- Letters of acceptance
- Needs assessment documents
  - — Financial Aid Form (FAF)
  - — Family Financial Statement (FFS)
  - — State scholarship forms/award letters

✔ Demonstrate a familiarity with available technology and the ways in which it can support the admission process:

- Financial aid information and eligibility
- Relevant record-keeping and follow-up

COMPETENCY 7

The Demonstration of Advocacy and Leadership in Advancing the Concerns of Students

College admission counselors should:

✔ Advocate the educational needs of students and work to ensure that these needs are addressed at every level of the school experience.

✔ Provide training, orientation, and consultation assistance to faculty, administrators, staff, and institution officials (e.g., trustees) to assist them in responding to the college admission counseling needs of students.

✔ Provide assistance to parents and families so that they will provide an informed and supportive environment in which students can achieve success in the pursuit of appropriate educational goals and during periods of transition from one educational level to another.

✔ Understand the political issues and climate of the school or college and work to improve and extend programs and services that strengthen the educational experiences of all students.

COMPETENCY 8

The Ability to Organize and Support a College Admission Counseling Program

College admission counselors should:

✔ Ensure that their respective programs meet the guidelines set forth in the NACAC *Statement on the Counseling Dimension of the Admission Process at the College/University Level.*

✔ Promote the availability of a continuum (through postsecondary education) of guidance and counseling experiences for all students and work with counselor counterparts at each educational level to ensure that student needs are addressed in a comprehensive, developmental, and articulated manner.

✔ Conduct appropriate planning design, research, and evaluation activities to ensure that all college admission counseling services are maintained at an effective and relevant level.

References

Statement of Principles of Good Practice. Alexandria, VA: National Association of College Admission Counselors, 1990.

Statement on the Counseling Dimension of the Admission Process at the College/University Level. Alexandria, VA: National Association of College Admission Counselors, 1990.

Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor. Alexandria, VA: National Association of College Admission Counselors, 1990.

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